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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NASSAU 001855

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [BF](#) [CARICOM](#)

SUBJECT: PM CHRISTIE: ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN U.S.
RELATIONS WITH CARIBBEAN

Classified By: CDA Robert M. Witajewski For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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1. (U) Prime Minister Perry Christie told an international audience in Miami on October 1 that while U.S. good intentions toward the English-speaking Caribbean are not in doubt, there is room for improvement in the overall relationship. Christie believed that the U.S. was not sufficiently sensitive to Caribbean concerns on issues including free trade, and hoped that generous international assistance would be forthcoming to help Caribbean countries recover from a devastating hurricane season which has already damaged them beyond their means. Christie acknowledged U.S. humanitarian assistance and its support for democracy, efforts which only underscored the importance of the U.S. and the wider Caribbean working together to find a permanent solution to the problems in Haiti. The Bahamian Prime Minister was a featured speaker at the Miami Herald's annual "Americas Conference."
End summary.

2. (U) Prime Minister Perry Christie addressed the Miami Herald's "Conference of the Americas" on October 1, 2004, delivering remarks on the theme "Friend or Foe? Can The Caribbean and the U.S. Repair Their Damaged Relations?". Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell and Carl Smith, coordinator of The Bahamas' "National Emergency Management Agency" (NEMA), accompanied the Prime Minister to Miami.

REASSESS IMPACT OF FREE TRADE ON SMALLER NATIONS

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3. (U) PM Christie, taking a more positive tone than the agenda theme would indicate, announced that he disagreed with the assertion that U.S.- Caricom relations are "damaged," declaring that he preferred instead to characterize the situation as leaving room for "improvement". He suggested that many of the areas of tension existing between the U.S. and Caricom nations could be resolved with increased regular dialogue.

"I would be less than candid if I did not say that there is a view in some quarters that there is not sufficiently deep understanding in the United States of the issues and concerns which face our region," Prime Minister Christie said. "Concerns for example about emerging free-trade arrangements seem sometimes to fall on deaf ears or are treated dismissively, without realizing that the entire economies of poor, struggling nations, especially in the Eastern Caribbean, hang in the balance. Simply cutting a check or making a sympathetic speech does not address these issues at a fundamental level. If sustainable development and economic viability are to remain within the grasp of these smaller and more vulnerable states, there simply has to be a re-assessment of the direction in which free trade arrangements are headed."

PM CALLS FOR GREATER ROLE IN HAITI?

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4. (U) Christie told his listeners that the main source of tension in the region currently stems from the February 29th departure of former Haitian President Jean Bertrande Aristide, and more specifically because the U.S. government did not better communicate with Caricom heads of state about events surrounding Aristide's resignation at the time. Christie encouraged the region to come together to help Haiti in its time of need.

"..It is so important for the United States and the wider Caribbean region to jointly promote democracy, peace, stability and growth in our sister nation of Haiti. The destruction that was wrought there by Tropical Storm Jeanne is of monumental and tragic proportions. We continue to watch, helplessly at times, as that beleaguered national still struggles to find its way. Make no mistake about it, all our collective talk about neighborly cooperation and democratization will be judged a fraud by history if we do not -- and by "we" I mean all the countries of the region -- pool our resources and bring the full weight of our resolve to bear on a permanent solution to the problems of Haiti."

In response to a question from the press, Christie cited issues surrounding official recognition of the interim-government of Haiti and Caricom's relationship with Cuba as being the major differences in regional policy.

HURRICANE RELIEF EFFORTS

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15. (U) PM Christie told the conference that while The Bahamas escaped the worst of the destruction brought by this season's series of hurricanes, parts of his country are still reeling. He stated that The Bahamas would need "all the help in the world that we can get." Christie offered to host a regional conference on to discuss how the United States and the Caribbean region can respond to natural disasters on a regional scale.

16. (U) Making a plea for further U.S. assistance to the region following Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne, Christie announced that a consensus had been reached at the Caricom Heads of State meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in September 2004 that the scale of disaster relief was beyond the resources of the Caribbean. While acknowledging the need for U.S. help for Grand Bahama and Abaco, Christie did admit that Grenada and Haiti "desperately need help from the international community and to the most generous extent possible."

COMMENT

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17. (C) The Bahamian Prime Minister envisions himself as a regional leader, and he used his speech at the conference to address hurricane relief issues and the concern over the implications of free trade agreements for the small, developing nations of the Caribbean. While making a clear pitch for the United States to give more humanitarian assistance to sister countries, Grenada and Haiti, the Prime Minister also referred to the "symbiotic relationship" the U.S. shares with The Bahamas repeated his oft-cited statistic that "eight cents out of every dollar earned in The Bahamas is spent in the U.S." as a lightly veiled attempt to demonstrate that Bahamian contributions to the economy in Florida should not go unnoticed while deciding how to distribute hurricane relief aid to the region.

18. (C) Indirectly via confidants and directly, Ambassador and DCM had previously urged that Christie not take his assigned theme literally but adopt a more positive stance in his remarks. He appears to have done so -- either heeding the suggestions or simply because he is by nature invariably upbeat and optimistic...and a former Tourism Minister in The Bahamas intimately familiar from whence the bulk of his country's tourist dollars come. Talking about the Prime Minister's remarks after he had returned from Miami, Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell told DCM that the Prime Minister had indeed deviated from his prepared text several times in the course of his remarks.

19. (C) Christie is anxious to play regional statesman and is undoubtedly pleased that his address got major coverage in the Bahamian and Miami media. Not only is Christie happy with his reception in Miami, he is equally pleased that Alberto Ibarguen, Miami Herald publisher, has invited him back to Miami to meet with the newspaper's editorial board -- an invitation that promises to generate further positive regional publicity for him. Christie brought Carl Smith, his disaster relief coordinator, with him on his Miami trip. During his trip, Christie did receive additional relief contributions from prominent Miami residents. But while he was basking on a regional stage with fellow national leaders, back home in The Bahamas local media featured growing criticism of his government's handling of the relief and reconstruction efforts in the wake of Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne.

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